The Best Defense? Your Offense

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A food manufacturing facility may just be a pest's dream come true. Unlimited supplies of food, lots of hiding places, a warm shelter in the winter and a cool escape in the summer. But it goes without saying that pests in your facility aren't just a nuisance, they're unacceptable. Pests can spread disease and threaten everything from your third-party audit to your bottom line.

The good news is that your best defense against pests is your offense, and that offense is right down the hall, on the plant floor or a break room away. Getting your employees onboard your integrated pest management (IPM) program is a critical step in preventing pests. IPM is a proactive approach that relies on non-chemical measures to deter pests and uses targeted chemical applications only as a last resort. IPM encourages team cooperation to help ensure pest management success.

In between visits from your pest management professional, your employees can help be the lookout for pest signs before an infestation gets out of hand:

1. Open up the lines of communication. Establish a good rapport between your pest management professional and your employees, so that everyone understands your pest prevention plan and what needs to happen. What does it mean for your facility if a pest is spotted? Explaining the overall picture helps everyone understand why it's so important to be proactive and work as a team.
2. Further their knowledge. Your pest management professional should offer free on-site employee training and educational resources you can share with your staff. If they don't know what they're looking for, how can you expect them to help? Education is the first step in empowering your staff to make an impact. An added bonus: Many food safety standards and third-party auditors actually require employee training.
3. Familiarize employees with pest "hot spots." These are the areas of your facility — both inside and out — that may be vulnerable to pest entry. Check doors and windows for any gaps and use weather stripping to seal any

holes. Outside, trim back vegetation that can serve as a walkway for pests into your facility. Your pest management professional can work with you and your staff to assess any other key areas of your facility.

4. Eliminate pests' needs. Sanitation is critical to reducing elements that attract pests, such as food, water and odors. Ask employees to monitor for standing water that can attract pests — especially rats. Even condensation on pipes can support a cockroach population. Ensure your staff's food is stored in tightly sealed containers. Remove waste frequently to eliminate another pest food source and cut down on attractants.
5. Note the signs of pest presence. Early monitoring for signs like rub marks, chew marks or droppings can help your pest professional to catch a problem early on, before costly damage is done. Glue boards and sticky traps are great tools to help detect crawling pests.
6. Set up a protocol for pest sightings. Do your employees know whom to contact if they spot a pest? Identify key staff members and a clear communications process for reporting a pest incident, so everyone knows how to respond should a problem occur.
7. Encourage teamwork. You've got them trained, you've got your playbook, and you're ready with a game plan if a problem occurs. Now, don't sit back and rest on your laurels — it's imperative to be proactive when it comes to a successful IPM program. With a strong offense that includes your employees and your pest management professional working together, your facility won't be defenseless against pests.

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